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Aquatic Nuisance Species bills signed into law; afford further protection for Great Lakes

January 9, 2004 — Owning certain exotic species of fish, such as silver and bighead carp, is now considered a felony under legislation sponsored by Senator Beverly Hammerstrom (R-Temperance) and approved by the Governor yesterday.

Public Acts 269 and 270 of 2004 also prohibit the release of transgenic and non-native fish in Michigan waters.

The recently signed legislation is included in a package of bills which addresses the issue of Aquatic Nuisance Species, including genetically engineered and foreign fish species, and their devastating effects to Michigan's waterways. The need for action became apparent after a Senate panel traveled the state in 2001 and heard from concerned residents regarding quality issues in the Great Lakes.

The Senate Great Lakes Conservation Task Force held eight hearings throughout the state in 2001 to gather information. As vice chair of the task force, Hammerstrom heard first-hand of the devastating effects transgenic and nonnative fish species posed to the Great Lakes.

"We listened to the people of Michigan and have followed through on the task force's mission to make protecting the Great Lakes a priority," Hammerstrom said.

Non-native fish carry exotic diseases and parasites and pose a major threat to the health of the Great Lakes basin and its natural habitats. Efforts to raise public awareness concerning exotic species increased in 1988, with the discovery of zebra mussels in Lake St. Clair. An estimated 140 exotic species, including the sea lamprey, round goby, alewife, and carp have made their way into the Great Lakes through the downstream flow of water caused by commercial and recreational boat traffic.

(More)

“It’s important that Michigan leads the effort in protecting the Great Lakes,” Hammerstrom said. “These laws enable us to honor our long-standing commitment to act as good stewards of the Great Lakes and encourage other governments to join us.”